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The True

JOHN DICKINSON

A Paper read February 23, 1912, before

The Hamilton Library Association Carlisle, Pa.

BY

PROFESSOR CHARLES F. HIMES

The Historical Society of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania
1912

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THE TRUE JOHN DICKINSON

It would be a sufficient explanation, if any were needed, of the selection of "John Dickinson" as a subject of a paper before this Association, that his name has been identified with an institution that has been the pride of our ancient borough for more than a century and a quarter, and that has carried its name far beyond our borders, or even the borders of our state; for the names of Dickinson College and Carlisle are inseparably linked in the minds and memories of many who have gone forth from them to achieve prominence in the nation.

But aside from this purely local interest in the man, John Dickinson is worthy of our consideration on account of his high character as a Pennsylvania statesman, not simply conspicuous but of profound influence in his day in the councils of his country. The charter of the college, in naming it "Dickinson College," in recognition of this fact says: "the name and title of which said College and the Constitution thereof, shall be and are hereby declared to be as is hereafter mentioned and defined, that is to say,

1. In memory of the great and important services rendered to his country by his excellency John Dickinson, Esquire, President of the Supreme Executive Council, and in commemoration of his very liberal donation to the Institution, the said College shall be forever hereafter called and known by the name of "Dickinson College."

But I have been led more particularly to the consideration of his character this evening, because there is, perhaps, no prominent statesman of his period who has been more completely misunderstood or more unjustly judged, or the study of whose character more essentially requires the historic perspective afforded by lapse of time for a just and complete estimate of him as a statesman and patriot. This fact first

impressed me some years ago in the preparation of a history of Dickinson College. It seemed that a brief sketch, at least, of the man after whom it was named would naturally be looked for in an account of the institution which bore his name.

No comprehensive and authentic biography of him could at that time be found. Other statesmen of the period in which he was a prominent actor, often of far less prominence or influence than he, were as a rule fully written up. Whilst no history of the country in the eventful period 1760-1783 or 1787, preceding, during, and for sometime in the formative period subsequent to the Revolution, can be written without full consideration of his participation and influence, the sketches of him were not only brief and fragmentary, but even in the best and standard histories the treatment of him was frequently from a one-sided point of view, and if not written by unfriendly hands, controlled by predjudice and bias, was at least by those unappreciative of, I am almost inclined to say incapable of appreciating, the full worth of his character, and his profound and lasting influence in the councils of the nation.

It is not proposed, in the limited time of this paper, to attempt a complete sketch of our subject, but rather to present some salient facts in their connection, that may exhibit his character as a patriŏt and statesman, that may give us a glimpse at least of the true John Dickinson.

The grave fact in regard to John Dickinson, more generally known, almost the only fact known by many and upon which judgment of him rests, is that he was not a signer of the Declaration of Independence; on the other hand that he was recognized as its ablest opponent at the time, and refused to vote for it. As a boy I remember well the feeling akin to mortification, that to Pennsylvania belonged the bad eminence of such a character. Nothing else that he had done, or in any way contributed toward the inauguration or success of the war of the Colonies against the encroachments of the mother country upon their liberties, seemed to be known or worth knowing, as a palliative of that unpardonable offense, whether the controlling motives were of the highest and purest, and

exhibited the highest moral courage or not. The nearest to an apology for him was that his course was due to a natural timidity that made him over cautious.

It is not surprising, when we consider the temper of the times, that the reasons for his course, and his arguments in support of it were not then fairly considered, nor his motives even honestly represented. But in due time, much sooner, and more complete than could have been expected, vindication came with the highest civic honors his state could bestow. With the successful close of the war of the Revolution in 1783, after a most exciting political contest, in which his opponents left no stone unturned to defeat him, he was placed in the chief executive office of the then acknowledged independent state of Pennsylvania. It is also worthy of remark that during the campaign he refused to pay attention to any of the old vamped-up assaults upon his character, reserving complete and conclusive reply to them until his fellow citizens had given their verdict.

As to the suggestion of timidity or want of physical courage, the significant fact is, that whilst others were signing the immortal document, for it was not completely signed until August, he was on the firing line with his regiment, risking his life in support of the Declaration, and was the only one of that Continental Congress that went to the front. Whatever may have been his judgment as to the wisdom of the measure at that time, or his own private feelings in regard to it, he regarded its passage as the voice of his country to which he gave no hestitating or half-hearted response.

As to the wisdom of his course, which related to the time as inopportune rather than to the act itself, we will find side by side with him many of the purest patriots and ablest statesmen of the colonies in his opposition to the Declaration of Independence at that time. Among these were James Wilson, and Robert Morris, of Pennsylvania and even Washington himself was late in adopting independence as unavoidable. I make these preliminary statements as a brief of the proposed paper, and that your judgment in regard to the man may be

kept open until we have come to the close of our consideration of him.

We will take but little time with his genealogy. He was, as most prominent men of Pennsylvania of that day, wholly of English descent. The first immigrants of the family were three brothers, who came to America about 1654, and settled in Virginia. They were Quakers in religious belief. One of them Walter removed from there to Talbot County, Maryland, in 1659, where John Dickinson was born, November 8, 1732. He was the second son of Samuel, a grandson of Walter. Samuel was a lawyer by profession. He purchased, as early as 1715, a large body of land in Kent County, Delaware, and removed there 1740, where he became a very influential citizen, and judge of the County Court. At his decease in 1760 his landed estate there had increased to 1300 acres.

It may be well to call attention to a fact here that may prevent some confusion when we speak of the public life of Dickinson.

He was by birth a native of Maryland, but after his eighth year, from what has been stated must be regarded as a citizen of what is now the state of Delaware, except when he was a citizen of Pennsylvania. But citizenship of Delaware, or for that matter of Pennsylvania, had a different significance than at present. The "three lower Counties of the Delaware," as they were called, were up to the time of the Revolution so intimately connected with Pennsylvania, that, though not an integral part of it, and always retaining their separate name, they were under the same proprietary government of William Penn, not by reason of the same grant as Pennsylvania, but by deed from the Duke of York to him of "the three lower Counties on the Delaware." Thus they recognized the same proprietary governor, and whilst they had nearly from the beginning an Assembly of their own, there were times when their Representatives formed part of the Assembly of Pennsylvania. As a consequence citizens of one Province were recognized as citizens of the other, and eligible to office in both.

Dickinson then was a citizen of Pennsylvania or Delaware for the greater part of his political life, and as such is found holding office in either or both.

His father was particularly solicitous in regard to his education. His removal to Delaware was prompted by motives of that character. There were few good classical schools at that time. He had considered sending him to England, as was very usual in those days, but the loss of two sons made him reluctant to do so, as we can well understand; for England was much further away in those days of sailing vessels than at present. He therefore, according to a custom very prevalent with the wealthier citizens of the time, employed a private tutor for his son. He was fortunate in securing the services of a talented young Irishman, William Killen, who not only proved to be an excellant teacher, and who took great personal interest in his pupil, but who was also ambitious for his own future. He became an inspiration to his pupil to that thoroughness of classical study, that influenced his mode of thought, as well as had much to do with the finished style manifest in all his literary productions, conceded by all, and that justified the opinion expressed by Jefferson: "That he was one of the most accomplished scholars the country has produced." It is gratifying to know that the teacher realized his highest ambition. He became not only a highly successful lawyer, but eventually Chief Justice and Chancellor of the state of Delaware.

Young Dickinson at eighteen years of age entered upon the study of the law, with John Moland, of Philadelphia, perhaps the leading lawyer of that city. In our day this seems an early age at which to enter upon serious professional study. But among his fellow students in the same office, one who became his intimate and life-long friend and an eminent lawyer and statesman, as well as one of the Signers from Delaware, George Read, was only fifteen years of age.

After his admission to the bar in 1753 he went to London and entered the Inns of Court for the completion of his legal studies. He was doubtless influenced somewhat to this course

by the fact that his preceptor Moland, had received his legal education there. He was much elated at the prospect, and went with all the enthusiasm of a young man.

These Inns of Court were not inaptly called by Ben Johnson: "the noblest nurseries of humanity and liberty in the kingdom." They occupy today with their Chambers and Halls and the antique historic Temple Church, with its graves and effigies of crusaders, ample grounds in the heart of the city of London. They were almost as historic when Dickinson entered them as today. They constitute still the institution through which students of law are licensed to practice in the English Courts; through which alone, indeed, a British subject may become a barrister. It is not a single school nor even a collection of schools of law, as we might understand it, but rather associations or societies of men pursuing the study of law under established requirements and regulations. The course though modified by time has much that is medieval left. It consists of so-called "bolts" or arguments in private on assigned cases; "moots" or public arguments on legal questions; readings and lectures, and what was equally obligatory and remains so today, the eating of a prescribed number of dinners in the dining hall of the society to which the student belongs. Young Dickinson became a member of the Middle Temple as it was then, and is still called. Its large dining-hall is one of the most perfect specimens of the Elizabethan period. In it, it is said, a play of Shakespeare's—Twelfth Night—was performed in the poet's time, and the walls are covered with portraits of many great, well-known men in English history. Many of England's greatest jurists and statesmen ate here their required number of dinners, and completed their legal studies. The American pre-Revolutionary students are not over-looked today. The old Usher, who proudly shows the Hall, and dilates upon its glories, runs glibly over the names of the great Americans, that were once inmates there. To my surprise he began the list with John Dickinson, but without historic accuracy, put him among the "Signees," which he seemed to esteem a great honor.

Dickinson associated here with those who were to become the great lawyers and judges and statesmen of England, to say nothing of prominent students from what we might call his own country, were it not that they were all then of his own country. This association was an education of itself; and the profound influence of these formative years of study and life must not be lost sight of in the interpretation of his attitude in his subsequent career toward distinctively American questions, especially when it is remembered that his most determined and violent, we might almost say unfair, or at least unappreciative opponents and detractors, were the leaders from New England, who had not enjoyed the advantages of such association, or thorough training in the Common Law of England and its principles that dominated him, and that made every question to him first of all a legal question, and restrained him from the appeal to the *ultima ratio* of the sword until all legal methods and resources had been exhausted.

On his return to America he entered upon the practice of the law in Philadelphia, where he was regarded as an able lawyer, and soon acquired a large practice. But as he was not dependent upon his practice, he did not make his talents and acquirements merely subservient to increasing his wealth, but gave much of his time to the study of great questions of state. These he did not consider simply as legal questions, and he became even more a statesman than a lawyer, not surpassed, if equalled by anyone in the Colonies in his profound knowledge of these subjects. At all times, one effect of his residence in England was to impress him with the grandeur and greatness of the British Empire, of which he acknowledged himself a citizen, and the superiority of his country over every other on the globe. He was filled with patriotic pride, and well might be as he read history, to be a citizen of that empire to which he not only owed allegiance, but for which he had a fervent attachment, and of which, he regarded the American Colonies as an integral part.

Combined with his training and studies his natural disposition gave him a trend toward political life, which he soon

followed, and from which a growing and lucrative legal practice did not deflect him. He began his political career as a member of the Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania in 1764. The great question agitating the Province at that time was a proposed change of the government of the Province from Proprietary under the Penns, to Royal, more immediately under the King of England; for the government of Pennsylvania differed greatly in this respect from that of the New England Colonies. The Province had been prosperous under the Penns. It may have been administered selfishly at times, but it could not be administered arbitrarily except as backed by the English Court. The question then was, shall the Province remain under the limited control of the Penns, as Proprietaries, or shall it pass under a Royal Charter, and pass more directly under the rule of the King and his ministry. It was a battle of giants. The question was a revolutionary one, with Franklin with his able political lieutenant Galloway on the side of a Royal Charter, and Dickinson in opposition. Although the question changed its aspect and soon lost its importance, in the greater questions that were then already pressing to the front, the lines then drawn, ran through the whole eventful subsequent period; Dickinson and Franklin were always on opposite sides, and Galloway went eventually, actively into the Tory camp. The debates were of the highest order. Dickinson boldly championed the unpopular cause. He was entirely without personal interest on the side that he espoused. The question is a complicated one in its entirety. To state it briefly; there was frequent conflict between the governors appointed by the Penns and the Assembly on two important points, viz: the voting of supplies and the mode of raising money for them. The Assembly under the influence of Franklin resorted to loans and paper money to which the Proprietaries were opposed. Defence of the frontiers was often weak by reason of these disputes. The Quakers were sometimes blamed for opposition to military supplies, and doubtless they were to some extent, and in 1755 Franklin presented a petition in London praying that Quakers might not be eligible to seats in the Assembly.

In 1763, whilst a bitter Indian war was raging, the Assembly in earnest response to appeals for help by the Scotch-Irish, who were located as buffers to Indian attacks on the frontier, voted money and men, and as a means of raising the money taxed the lands of the Proprietaries as well as of others. The Governor John Penn, absolutely refused to carry out the latter provision of the law, and the Assembly, moved by the distressing conditions of the settlers, yielded that point, raised the money, and Bouquet's expedition was dispatched. Some of those most exposed, exasperated by the delay, and attributing it to Quaker influence, committed the outrages on the Indians known as "Outrages of the Paxtang boys."

Great unanimity, therefore, as might be expected, prevailed against the Proprietaries and their Governors, without whose consent no legislation could be enacted, whilst they were in no way responsible to the people, with the resulting inequality of taxation and feebleness of the defence of the Province. Resolutions proposed in the Assembly by Galloway setting forth the grievances against the Proprietaries and recommending the appointment of a committee were unanimously passed by the Assembly; and Franklin at a subsequent meeting reported a petition to the King proposed by himself, asking His Majesty "to resume the government of the Province." The petition was numerously signed, but singular to say the Presbyterians of Eastern Pennsylvania, with changed front, circulated a counter petition, deprecating rash action, and expressing fears of abridgement of the privileges enjoyed under the charter. Dickinson, who was not present when the resolutions were passed, at once attacked the petition. Whilst admitting the defects of the Proprietary administration, his knowledge of the British ministry led him to fear that it would be dangerous to place any confidence in them; that the very worst acts of the proprietaries were those in which they were supported by the ministry; that the change would render insecure the priceless privileges that had made Pennsylvania what she was in the eyes of the world. The speech has been pronounced the strongest of all his productions, from the logic

of which it is impossible to escape. The petition, however, passed with only four opposing votes, and in less than three months, Dickinson's worst predictions were realized. In this speech, three months before the passage of the Stamp Act, he suggested forcibly the designs of the British Ministry on the liberties of the Colonies; he regarded the direct government of the King as no remedy for the evils complained of, but as fraught with danger to the Colonies; and urged that "with unremitting vigilance and with undaunted virtue should a free people watch against the encroachment of power, and remove every pretext for its extension."

The speech had its effect outside of the Assembly on the Proprietaries and on public opinion in regard to the Ministry. The rupture between Dickinson and Galloway, the dominant political leader of the Province, was complete and permanent. The very able speech published as Galloway's was denounced by Dickinson as not the one actually delivered by him. He regarded him justly with suspicion, and this fact must not be lost sight of in considering his course in the grave political movements in the Province that rapidly followed. He was affected, if not controlled largely by his consideration of him as a powerful political factor, always to be reckoned with in the Province, devoted to the side of the Ministry, as he proved eventually to be by his open resort to the British lines. As the result of Dickinson's course in this case he lost his seat in the Assembly. He was not, however, indifferent to events transpiring around him, or idle. The Ministry in its efforts to raise revenue turned to the Colonies, as it were to an untouched source. In March, 1764, Parliament passed the so-callled Sugar Act, which was intended, practically, to turn all the commerce of foreign countries with the Colonies through London. A Stamp Act was at the same time proposed. The news of these Acts stirred the Colonies. The Assembly of Pennsylvania protested against them. Much was written, and there were as many opinions as writers on this comparatively new subject. Dickinson with his full command of English history and law turned his attention to it. He wrote a pamph-

let, primarily intended to influence the English merchants against the measure, in which he set forth not only the injustice of it, but the great impolicy of it, as violative of the elementary principles of political ecomony. The passage of the Stamp Act shortly after threw the colonies into a still more violent ferment. Much confusion arose in the discussion of the now clearly evident purpose of the Ministry to assert the paramount power of Parliament over the Colonies, including the right to tax them for Imperial purposes. A proposition for a Congress of the Colonies to consider the situation was acceded to by nine Colonies. This known as the Stamp Act Congress, met in New York, October, 1765. Although the proceedings were private, it is known that the discussions were at times violent The presiding officer was a prominent tory, who found his way into the British lines. The governor of New York even threatened to break up the Congress. In this first historic Congress of the Colonies, Dickinson was appointed to bring order out of chaos by drafting resolutions expressive of their views. This notable paper, which practically included a Bill of Rights, was adopted by six of the nine Colonies represented. The repeal of the Stamp Act, which followed soon after, only enlarged and intensified the discussion, by the declaration accompanying it of the right of Parliament to tax the Colonies for Imperial purposes. The great struggle was on. In this crisis amid the confusion and doubt arising from the variety of, often conflicting opinions, Dickinson came to the front as a leader. In the Pennsylvania Chronicle of December, 1767, he bagan a series of letters, which at once attracted public attention throughout the Colonies, and the "Letters of the Farmer" were looked for weekly with intense interest. There were fourteen in all. He began: "I am a farmer, settled after a variety of fortunes, near the banks of the river Delaware in the Province of Pennsylvania. I have received a liberal eductaion, and have been engaged in the busy scenes of life, but am now convinced that a man may be as happy without bustle as with it. Being generally master of my time, I spend a good deal of it in my library, which I think the most valuable

part of my small estate. I have acquired, I believe, a greater knowledge of history and of the laws and constitution of my country than is generally attained by men of my class." These letters, as they were styled, of a Pennsylvania Farmer, soon became known not only throughout the Colonies, but in England as well, and even in France through a translation, published by Franklin, who was then in England. Clear, simple, eloquent and forcible in style, abounding in illustrations founded on an examination of all the statutes since the settlement of the Colonies, they set forth exhaustively and definitely their rights and grievances in such a way as to impress the Colonists, to quote his own words, that "a most dangerous innovation upon their liberties was about to be attempted by the British Ministry; and whilst his recommendation was, "immediately, vigorously and unanimously to exert themselves in the most firm, but peaceable manner for obtaining relief," he added, "if an inveterate resolution is formed to annihilate the liberties of the governed, English history affords examples of resistance by force." As Bancroft says, "the Farmer's Letters carried conviction through the thirteen colonies." But they did more. They in a great measure molded public sentiment. They united the Colonies in sympathy and in action and encouraged them. They became in fact the text-book of the Colonists on that subject. Nowhere was the appreciation of the Farmer's opportune help more sincere than at Boston. A letter of thanks reported to an adjourned town-meeting by a committee, which included Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and Doctor Warren, unanimously adopted and ordered to be published, set forth the obligations of America to him for a most reasonable, sensible, loyal and vigorous vindication of her invaded rights and liberties." The College of New Jersey, according to a letter of Madison, then a student there, 1769, to his father, conferred the unusual honor of LL.D. upon "John Dickinson the Farmer."

As events rapidly developed his position as an acknowledged political leader in Pennsylvania gave him still more de-

eided prominence in Colonial affairs. It required no ordinary ability to occupy such a position in Pennsylvania, on account of the numerous conflicting, irreconcileable political factors. Whilst at times he seems to check a popular tendency toward a rupture with Great Britain, and consequent independence, a closer study of the situation shows that he was in advance of the controlling elements of the state in this respect, and comprehended fully the character, influence and numbers of those "who cherished," as he puts it, "a passionate desire for reconciliation with the mother country."

The Farmer's letters were unimpassioned, free from threats or invective, appealing only to their rights as British subjects under the Constitution; and without suggestion of independence, they were as firm as they were conciliatory. They met the views fully of the Middle and Southern Colonies, whose leading men like Dickinson were lawyers, many of them trained in the Temple as he was. There were few lawyers of that kind among the leaders of New England. Already in the Stamp Act Parliament they began to speak of natural rights, and to base their action on higher law.

Whilst American institutions may all today be considered as resting on law higher even than written constitutions, it was a doctrine not recognized then. We are familiar with it now. It was that recognition of a higher law than constitutional provisions that led to the great Civil War, and its results. And even today should the rights of the people become enmeshed in judiciary decisions, in which for any reason they may have lost full confidence, appeal might be made to the same higher law. But New England had not only this revolutionary tendency, but it was naturally restive under the repressive measures that affected it particularly. Samuel Adams requested Dickinson to use his pen in their behalf, suggesting the particular topic. Dickinson replied courteously declining; but between the lines could be read, that he only wrote from strong convictions of his own, and under sense of public duty; not at the suggestion of, or to please others. They sent Paul Revere from Boston to Phila-

delphia, May, 1774, asking expression of sympathy and co-operation, after the passage of the Boston Port Bill. They called on Dickinson, knowing the influence of his name. They were accompanied by some of his most intimate personal friends, and tried in every way, to persuade him to be present at a meeting to encourage the people of Boston. They tried the social cup, and even flattery as the author of the Farmer's Letters. But he could not be brought to approve of their violent measures. Finally, he consented to attend the meeting and make a short speech expressing sympathy and advising them to request the Governor to convene the Assembly to consider the condition. In Dickinson's absence resolutions expressing sympathy with Boston were drawn up, and suggesting payment for the tea that had been destroyed. This letter was, as John Adams said, "coldly received in Boston." Dickinson lost and never recovered the place in their estimation; and their historians taking their cue and their information from them have at least been heedless in many cases of the injustice done him, which has waited the tardy years for its complete correction, as will be noted. Thus Bancroft, whilst he speaks of him as having been taught from his infancy to love humanity and liberty, and of his claims to public respect as indisputable, of the honor showed for his spotless morals, of his eloquence and services in the colonial Legislature, and of the writings that had endeared him to America as a sincere friend of liberty, speaks, in this connection, of his maturing a scheme in the solitude of his retreat to control the meeting at Philadelphia after the receipt of the Boston Port Bill, and that he embodied with calculating reserve in a letter to Boston the system which for the coming year was to form the policy of America.

Now we have seen that the course of Dickinson at this meeting was deliberately determined on in free consultation with most ardent patriots, and with the approval of Charles Thomspon, Secretary of the Congress, and styled for his radical patriotism, the Sam. Adams of Philadelphia. The letter, though it did embody the policy of Dickinson, and was long attributed to him, was written by another, during his

absence from the meeting, and although received with impatience in Boston was endorsed by Sam. Adams, who confessed himself fully of the Farmer's sentiments, "violence and submission would be at this time equally fatal." But after that so-called chilling letter to Boston, he took an active, a controlling part in bringing Pennsylvania into line on that point with the other Colonies. At a large meeting of citizens in State House Square he presided; he had been active in calling the meeting. It declared against the Boston Port Bill but what was more practical created a Committee of Correspondence, not simply with the other Colonies, but with similar committees in all the counties of the Province, thus originating the effective machinery for carrying out the resolves of the people. Dickinson was made chairman of this committee. It called a conference of delegates from the counties of the Province. That irregularly constituted conference boldly assumed not only to instruct the regular assembly to elect delegates to a Congress of the Colonies, but to draw up complete instructions as to the election and action of the delegates. The conference passed three important papers, all drawn up by Dickinson. With Galloway, a thorough loyalist as speaker, the Assembly could not be expected to do any thing of its own motion, but fearing if it did nothing the Conference would act, and elect the delegates, it adopted unanimously the recommendations of the Conference, but, with a political cleverness equal to anything in our day, excluded Dickinson and others from eligibility, by confining, the selection of delegates to members of the Assembly, of which Dickinson was not then a member. It did seem singular that the "Farmer," who had done so much to create and mold public sentiment should not be a member of the body that was to formulate measures. But at the election, Oct. 17, 1774, he was elected to the Assembly of Pennsylvania, with practical unanimity, and was immediately added to the delegation in Congress. Here he was at once added to the Committee appointed to prepare an address to the King, and although it was only a week before the adjournment of the

Congress, he drafted the paper, which with but little amendment, was adopted. It was a paper described as penned with extraordinary force and animation, frequently rising to a high strain of eloquence, and was one of the papers that elicited the celebrated encomium of Catham upon the Continental Congress. Its authorship was attributed to Adams, and Henry and Lee, and at a comparatively recent date was ascribed by an eminent individual in an historical address to John Adams. But there is no question on this point. Even Chief Justice John Marshall in his life of Washington attributed it to Lee. Dickinson called his attention to it through a friend, and also that in several volumes of published writings of his, it was given as his, which could not have been done without his knowledge, adding the following words: "The question whether I wrote the first Petition to the King is of little moment, but the question whether I have countenanced an opinion that I did write it, though in reality I did not, is to me of vast importance." The Chief Justice fully explained his mistake, after an examination of the minutes of the Congress, with expressions of sincere regret.

An address was also issued by this first Congress, 1774, to the inhabitants of Quebec. This was a matter of great delicacy, in view of its recent acquisition from France. This paper entrusted to Dickinson had the same high character. It was a clear and forcible statement to these people, lately brought under English rule, of their rights as British subjects.

At this time he resided at his fine country seat of Fair Hill, then one of the suburbs of Philadelphia, now a densely populated portion of it, surrounded by all the comforts and advantages of wealth and high social and professional position. His marriage with Miss Mary Norris, the daughter of the Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, had no tendency to repress his literary or political activity. His mode of life is frequently alluded to by John Adams in his diary. In noting his first meeting with him he says: "The Farmer of Pennsylvania came in his coach with four beautiful horses to see us." His residence he afterward characterized as "very

fine with its beautiful prospect of the city, the river, the country, the gardens and the very grand library." The latter was very largely the accumulation of his father-in-law, Isaac Norris, the Speaker of the Assembly of Pennsylvania, whose book-plate appears in many volumes in the College library, presented by Dickinson. With magnificent hospitality, characteristic of the Philadelphia of that day, he welcomed the delegates from the sister Colonies to that first Continental Congress, and earnestly and anxiously discussed the crisis in public affairs. How his conduct was regarded by the Government of Great Britian is best indicated by the fact that this Mansion of Fair Hill was destroyed after the battle of Germantown as the property of the "d—d rebel Dickinson."

After the adjournment of the Congress, it was of the utmost importance to have the measures adopted by it—endorsed by the separate Colonies. Dickinson made it a point to attend the Assembly of Pennsylvania, and there, in spite of Galloway, the experienced and shrewd and popular leader of the large and influential loyalist faction, he secured the approval of the proceedings of the Congress; and Pennsylcania was under his leadership thus the first Colony to take such action. But he went further, as Chairman of the Committee of Correspondence of the Colony, its directing and organizing body, he called a convention to meet in Philadelphia in Jan., 1775, which was only the second convention of the kind called. There he urged the observance of the non-importation act. Whilst he was working and hoping for a peaceable solution of the difficulties with the mother country, he was no less active in organizing a military force for any possible emergency. A petition was presented by the Committee to the Assembly urging the organization of a Committee of Safety and Defence, of which Dickinson was made Chairman; and of the five batallions of Volunteers—called Associaters—he was elected Colonel of the first batallion.

But the Congress that met in May, 1775, proceeded cautiously. The impulsive leaders of the New England delegation were decided for independence. They were im-

patient of any opposition. The more thoughtful statesmen of the Middle Colonies and some of the southern had not yet reached that point. Dickinson still hoped that all rights might be secured as British subjects. With him, as opposed to a declaration of independence at that time, were James Wilson and Robert Morris and Read of Delaware, and many others and especially a great part of the population of Pennsylvania. Whilst engaged vigorously in military preparations Dickinson urged another last effort at conciliation in the form of a second Petition to the King, thinking doubtless that, perhaps, the lessons of Bunker Hill and Lexington might have convinced him of the seriousness at least of the conflict. The motion was violently opposed by John Adams. He spoke in unrestrained language of all who advocated it. Dickinson, too, it is said, lost his temper in the discussion. But the petition was ordered, and as usual Dickinson was appointed to draft it, with about the only result of causing him to be included by the King in his proclamation as a dangerous and designing man. But these efforts though sincere for a peaceable solution did not check the preparations for the defence of their rights by force. Congress ordered the preparation of a "Declaration of the Causes and Necessity for taking up Arms," which was entrusted as the others had been to Dickinson. It was an able, statesmanlike paper. Although it sought to quiet the fears of those who were unfavorable to independence by asserting that, "Necessity had not driven them into that desperate measure," it also declared "we can not endure the infamy of quietly resigning succeeding generations to that wretchedness which inevitably awaits them, if we basely entail hereditary bondage upon them. We most solemnly before God declare that, exerting the utmost energy of those powers which our beneficent creator has graciously bestowed upon us the arms we have been compelled by our enemies to assume, we will in defiance of every hazard, with unabating firmness and perseverance employ for the preservation of our liberties, being with one mind resolved to die freemen rather than live slaves." According to Bancroft this Declaration was read

on the 15th of July, by the President of Harrvad College to the army of Washington at Cambridge, and on the 18th was read at Prospect Hill, amid such shouts that the British on Bunker Hill put themselves in array for battle." But the same eminent historian ascribes a portion, at least, of the address to Jefferson, without even mentioning Dickinson's name in connection with it at all. Another historian says of it, "That production was one of the most popular ones ever issued by Congress. It was read amid thundering huzzas in every market place, and amid fervent prayers in nearly every pulpit in the Colonies. The commanders read it at the head of our Armies. It was quoted again and again admiringly in history."

Fortunately now it has been placed beyond a reasonable doubt that Dickinson was the author of the whole of it. It was published among his writings in full during his life time in 1801. That would seem sufficient, from the well-known character of Dickinson. But twenty years after his death the nephew of Jefferson attributed the last four paragraphs to Jefferson. His statement was based on a memorandum of Jefferson, when 77 years old, in effect that the first Committee made a report on the Declaration that was not satisfactory to Congress; that he and Dickinson were then added to the Committee; that he drew an address too strong for Dickinson; that it was given to Dickinson, of whom he speaks in that connection as "so able and honest a man," to put in a shape that he could approve; and that he reported it, retaining only the last four and a half paragraphs, which are the paragraphs usually quoted. Apart from question of style, and other considerations, the question has been decided by the discovery of the original first draft of the whole. In the report of an expert,* who made an exhaustive examination of the whole question, he says: "There is no room whatever for doubt. The suggestion of imitation or forgery is excluded. No person but the author himself ever had any hand in the

*John Dickinson, the Author of the Declaration on Taking up Arms, in 1775, by George H. Moore, LL. D., Superintendent of Lenox Library, New York, MDCCCXC.

preparation of this document. It is in the handwriting of John Dickinson, and these corrections, additions, interlineations, revisions in number, extent, position and character forbid the supposition that he copied any portion of this paper from a draft by Mr. Jefferson, or any other person. It is the original first draft of the whole, and the proof of it is in no portion of the whole more conspicuous and certain than in the last four paragraphs and a half." A sight of the fac simile tends to confirm this opinion by reason of the number and character of the interlineations, etc. It shows too, incidentally, the care with which these historic documents, that may well be regarded as great American classics, were prepared and finished, not simply thrown off rapidly and carelessly. The comparison as to hand-writing was made with the authentic drafts of one of the Petitions to the King and the Address to the Inhabitants of Quebec, before alluded to. It might have been an easy matter for Jefferson, after lapse of so many years, at the age of 77, to have erred in his recollection insofar as to confuse verbal with written suggestions. But the style and diction of the address are that of Dickinson.

But as member of the Secret Committee of Foreign Affairs in that Congress he performed most valuable service, for which he was perhaps better fitted than any other; and as member of the Committee ordered to prepare a plan for treaties with foreign powers, he reported the draft. At same time as member of the Committee on Confederation of the Colonies, it fell to his lot to report the original draft of the Confederation.

In all this time the question of Independence was coming to the front, and injected into all discussions. Although in commenting upon the Farmer's Letters, Bancroft, the great historian, remarks, that he came forth before the Continent as the champion of American rights, he at the same time stated none too strongly the other side of his character as an enthusiast in his love for England, "who accepted the undefined relations of the Parliament to the Colonies as a perpetual compromise." In this he was sustained by the

whole country. In the language of the Boston letter of thanks to him it was by "leaning on the pillars of the British Constitution that he had instructed America in the best means to obtain redress." Although the second petition to the King was regarded with impatience, especially by those from New England, it was in accordance with the judgment and ardent wishes of many eminent patriots. But upon its rejection by the King the question of Independence at once assumed great prominence, and Dickinson became the ablest, or perhaps it would be more correct to say the most persistent opponent of an immediate Declaration, as John Adams may be regarded as the ablest advocate of that measure. The patriotism and the ability of neither could be called in question. They were the products and representatives of essentially different political, social and religious conditions. The impulse for independence came from New England. Those Colonies with royal governors were in frequent conflict with the Crown. Their interests clashed with Royal prerogatives; they became familiarized with the language of opposition and rebellion, and they were the first to feel the oppression and realize the designs of the British Ministry. Pennsylvania, on the other hand, under its proprietary form of Government, with many special privileges, in its disputes with the Proprietaries was accustomed to look to the King for relief. Again Adams was of a people that always regarded war as a means to accomplish the divine purposes; their acquisitions from the natives were by war; whilst Dickinson was surrounded by influences adverse to war as an agent of good; and the peaceable conquests of his Province were regarded by many as the proudest incidents of its history. Add to these influences the conservatism natural to wealth, high social position and literary tastes, and it seems natural that the Pennsylvania leader should differ on many points from the New Englander. Both were deeply thoughtful as well as earnest and sincere. Adams no less than Dickinson realized the momentous character of the measure advocated. The petitions to the King were not mere skirmishes for position on the part of Dickinson

in a conflict regarded as inevitable. They were sincere in every expression of loyalty, and were written with the earnest hope that they might accomplish their purpose, and that "England might be induced to return to her old good humor her old good nature." At the same time he was jealous of every right as a British subject, under the British Constitution, and willing to defend them by force if necessary. Neither was his view of the destiny of America more contracted or wanting in range than that of the other. He did not look upon the Continent of America as an appendage to the British State, but as an integral part of a grand British Empire. An American was not simply to him a reproduced Briton. "Here," he wrote with almost prophetic vision, "individauls of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the Western pilgrims who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts and sciences, of vigor and industry which began long since in the East. They will finish the great circle." Whilst it seems natural that Adams coming from New England, suffering from the measures of the Ministry, with his conclusions as clearly reached in regard to the ultimate issue as the q. e. d. of a mathematical demonstration, should have been impatient of any measure or any man that delayed the inevitable, it was equally natural for Dickinson, the Pennsylvania leader, to court delay as long as any hope of reconciliation could be entertained. And yet there was no reason why their common earnest and unselfish interest in the welfare of what they regarded as their common country should not have made those leaders fast friends, in spite of their decided differences on many points. They met first during the Congress of 1774. Adams, to use his own words, "had found Dickinson a very modest man, and very ingenious as well as agreeable, with an excellent heart, and the cause of his country near it; he had spent a delightful time with him; had had "sweet communion in which Dickinson gave his thoughts and correspondence very freely." In the foreign policy of the Colonies they were fully in accord.

But it was the accidental capture of letters written by Adams during the debate on the second petition to the King, and their publication by the British which led to a life-long estrangement, which no one regretted more than Adams. The fact simply of the letter and its results as given by Bancroft, without an intimation of the regret of Adams hardly does justice to that statesman. He explains in his diary that he wrote the letter hastily on account of the importunity of a friend, and at a time when he was provoked at what he considered a magisterial lecture from Mr. Dickinson, and perhaps smarting even more over his defeat by him in Congress. In the correspondence of his latter years he admits the important part the petitions to the King played as overlooked by him at the time, and speaks of the reputation of these compositions as a splendid distinction.

Considering it in all its bearings the statement that Dickinson was the leading opponent of the Declaration impeaches neither his courage, his patriotism nor his statesmanship. He regarded it as premature. He recognized a great want of unanimity among the colonists, and an earnest, faithful body of friends of America in England. In his view many measures should have preceded so decisive a step. As he read history he found causes for fear in the diverse interests and characters and the jealousies of the several colonies, and that without an umpire, such as they had in England, they might become a prey to foreign domination. He desired that the most threatening of inter-colonial questions should be settled, and a firm form of Confederation established, so that the weight of a united country could be thrown into the contest. He also thought that more favorable terms could be secured from foreign governments before than after a declaration, and was opposed to any measure that looked like sacrificing independence of foreign governments for independence of England. In addition, as a Pennsylvania politician, the leading one on the patriot side, he understood the great bitterness, as well as diversity of feeling existing in that colony among the different factions. With some others

he had taken pains to travel through the doubtful counties of Pennsylvania to ascertain directly the temper of the people. He felt that he had the confidence of all parties. He had been elected after his advocacy of the second petition, practically, without opposition, in spite of the censures of New England men. He kenw, as Doctor Rush has stated it, that John Adams, after the intercepted letter reflecting on him had been published, had "walked the streets of Philadelphia alone, an object of nearly universal scorn and detestation." The instructions of the Asssembly that appointed him a delegate were explicit against a declaration of independence. The majority of the Pennsylvania delegation were opposed to it, including James Wilson, Robert Morris and George Ross. The Convention called to supercede the regular government, with but a minority in control, he regarded not only as usurpation, but as unnecessary. The whole proceedings remind us of the manner in which many of the Southern States were carried into the secession movement, which we then termed bull-dozing. The constitution that that Convention adopted on Tom Paine's model, and not submitted to the people, was impracticable, and kept the State in a condition bordering on anarchy during the whole war, and for some time afterward. However necessary revolutionary measures may have been in other states, with Royal Governors, the government of Pennsylvania was in the hands of the people and its patriot leaders, with Dickinson at the head, felt that they were bringing the people with them to the point, at which the State, through its regularly constituted government would throw its whole, and great weight into the contest. It seemed worth a few months of delay to accomplish this. On the other hand it is natural that the interference and dictation of the New Englanders, and their revolutionary interference with matters strictly belonging to Pennsylvania should not have been kindly received on the part of the recognized leaders of the Province. This view of Dickinson's motives and policy is in accordance with the account of Charles Thompson, Secretary of the Congress, and as we

have said, styled for his radical patriotism the Sam. Adams of Pennsylvania. He expressed the opinion, that "had the Whigs of the Assembly of Pennsylvania been left to pursue their own measures there is every reason to believe they would have affected their purpose, prevented that disunion which has unhappily taken place, and brought the whole Province as one man with all its force and weight of government, into the common cause." In the final debate side by side with Dickinson from Pennsylvania was the great lawyer and statesman James Wilson, and Robert Morris, and George Ross. Although they yielded at the last moment; as Bancroft says, Dickinson would have held it guilt to suppress his opinions, and the ruling motives of his whole public life were condensed in his prefatory remark: "I value the love of my country as I ought, but I value my country more; I desire this illustrious assembly to witness the integrity if not the policy of my conduct." His position of hesitation is expressed in his closing remarks: "Upon the whole, when things shall be thus deliberately rendered firm at home and favorable abroad, then let America '*Attollens humeris famam et fata nepotum*' advance with majestic steps and assume her station among the sovereigns of the world." Hildreth regarded this opposition of Dickinson to the Declaration "as an example of moral courage of which there are few instances in our history." The vote of Pennsylvania was cast on the first day, 4 to 3 against independence. On the second day Morris and Dickinson absented themselves and allowed the three others to constitute a majority to cast the vote of Pennsylvania for the Declaration. Morris, however, signed the Declaration, but saying that "in his poor opinion it will neither promote the interest, or redound to the honor of America, for it has caused division where we wanted union." As we have already stated Dickinson did not sign the Declaration he could not vote for, but instead went to the front at once with his regiment to repel a threatened attack—to support a Declaration his countrymen had made contrary to his best and deliberate judgment. His bitter political opponents in Pennsyl-

vania, with the political machinery in their hands, however, deposed him from leadership. Another was elected who would sign the Declaration. He withdrew to Delaware on approach of the British to Philadelphia. The patriotic party there soon offered him a seat in the Continental Congress from that State, which, although urged by Rush and Thompson to accept, he declined. But in 1779, when the affairs of the Colonies were in a desperate condition he accepted, urged to do so by Jay, President of Congress. He was welcomed back, and at once given important duties. As Chairman of Committee to prepare a report on the finances, which seemed to be in a hopeless condition, he took advantage of the opportunity to impress upon the Colonies the weakness of their Federal Union. The relations with France and Spain involved questions of highest character in regard to the Mississippi Valley, the fisheries, etc., in connection with negotiations for treaties; and the instructions to Adams, then Commissioner to England, as prepared by Dickinson were substantially those agreed upon in the treaty of 1783. He resigned his seat in 1779, and on his return to Delaware, in spite of his protestations, was made President of the State. In 1782 he returned to Philadelphia, where the fight was bitter between those who upheld the Constitution of 1776, and the Anti-Constitutionalists, who regarded it as inadequate, as well as revolutionary; practically the old fight renewed. The bitterest personalities were indulged in against him, but he was made President of the new State. Year after year, for three years—the limit, he was re-elected, and conducted an administration successful in dealing with some questions of highest delicacy and moment, of which we have not time to speak.

In 1786, on his return to Delaware, he was appointed Commissioner from that State to meet Commissioners from the other States, upon the invitation of Virginia, at Annapolis, to recommend measures to the States for making their Union of States more effective. Only six States had representatives there. He was made President of the Convention, and was entrusted with making a report to

Congress, the suggestions of which were adoppted February, 1787, out of which grew the Convention which formed the Constitution of the United States. He was a member of that Convention from Delaware, to this last Convention, then of the States, as he had been, as you may recall, a member of the first, or Stamp Act Congress, in 1765, and had controlled that turbulent body, and had given efficacy to its proceedings. In the Continental Congress he had originated the plan for the federation of the Colonies which, with all its inevitable weaknesses, which no one knew better than he, carried the Colonies through the war, and now, in this last Convention, of which he was to be a member, he played an important part in perfecting the form of government we now enjoy. He expressed there a doubt as to the policy of interweaving with a Republican constituiton a veneration for wealth in deciding the question of suffrage. But the question on which the Convention almost broke up, with various propositions for its solution, was the representation of the State in the proposed legislature—whether by States as in the old Congress or according to population. Dickinson was foremost in solving this most delicate question; and on his motion, unanimously agreed to, the Constitution of the U. S. Senate was fixed. Many other provisions were ably discussed by him.

After the formation of the Constitution by the Convention, the question of its adoption by the States became the overshadowing one, and was warmly contested. Dickinson wrote a series of letters, over the signature of Fabius, discussing its provisions and advocating its adoption. After its adoption, however, the country was still divided into two great parties, the one—the Federalists—construing its provisions liberally, with a tendency toward centralization; the other, the Anti-Federalists, led by Jefferson, holding to a strict construction, and limitation of the powers of the general government. Dickinson, although independent on many points, adhered to the latter. He was an intimate personal friend and admirer of Jefferson, as well as political correspondent. Thus he "hailed the election of Jefferson with un-

feigned satisfaction." He thought that "our influence ought not to be confined to the limits of our land." In a letter to Jefferson, Jan. 22, 1804, he writes: "The persevering hatred of the Federalists afflicts me whenever I think of it. It is ominous;" then complimenting his admisistration, he says: "History has been a favorite study with me, and I can with truth declare that in all its pages I have never met with such an instance of embittered and unprovoked hostility, yet in defiance of all this rage thy country loves thee." In this letter is noticeable, too, his return to the plain speech of the Quakers in his later life.

When urged to become a Senator from Delaware under the Constitution of the United States, he declined on the ground of health, and said no one could form any idea of the distress from weakness of the body that he had undergone by endeavoring to sustain a public position with some decency whilst laboring under such infirmities.

His marriage to Mary Norris in 1770 was a very quiet one, in presence of immediate relatives, and by a justice of the peace—instead of in Friends Meeting—a fact deplored by some of her friends. But some how they lived happy ever afterward. In a journey by carriage to the Western parts of the State they came as far as Carlisle, so that when the question of establishing a College at this point in the far west was considered, they were not entirely wanting in information in regard to it. He was liberal to all worthy causes. His interest in higher education was manifested by gift of a fund of $500 to Princeton College, the interest to be applied as a prize for the best essay on several subjects. At the founding of Dickinson College he gave a plantation of 200 acres in what is now Adams Co., and one of 300 acres in Cumberland County, and what may be even more, he gave 1500 volumes, saved from the library at Fair Hill, when it was destroyed by the British. At the organization of the College, in 1784, after a sermon in the Episcopal church in Carlisle, he delivered an able address in the Court House. He had a great admiration for Dr. Nisbet, the first President, and contributed

liberally to his comfort. In his last years at Wilmington he was loved and respected of all, and regarded by all as an important political character. At his death, in 1808, both houses of Congress passed resolutions expressive of his high services to his country.

Whether he signed the Declaration, or whether he advocated or opposed it never seemed to have any influence on those who lived in that period.

It may be more of a question today, with fuller knowledge of the facts, as to how far the able opposition of such men as James Wilson, Robert Morris, John Dickinson and others contributed to the ultimate success of the Revolution by any delay occasioned, or how much unnecessary suffering and sacrifice was occasioned by haste, or to put it otherwise, in how far the Revolution succeeded in spite of, rather than by reason of such haste. But after all it was the spirit of the American people, based on a knowledge of their rights and the peril to them, that made the Declaration the historic document it became; and no one disputed, not even those who assailed him most bitterly, that he played a leading part, from the very beginning, in the education of the American people up to a just comprehension of their rights and the proper way to secure them, and did more to inspire them with that enduring patriotic devotion that carried them through the long and often disheartening struggle.

Had he been more selfishly ambitious and less scrupulous in the use of means, it may be safely said he might have reached higher political position.

His military record has been touched upon lightly. He did it is true almost inaugurate the military preparations of Pennsylvania. He did go to the front at first call after the Declaration; he was, I suppose, a sort of emergency man at the battle of Brandywine. But these can not be regarded as more than mere incidents in the life of this great man. They had it is true their moral effect; they did show not only that he was not wanting in physical courage, but the extent ot

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the sacrifice he was willing to make, for he had no military ambition to incite him.

His part in that great struggle was not military, but to present the cause of his country as it appeared to him with such clearness and eloquence and boldness as his great abilities enabled him to do, backed by a character that his countrymen regarded as unimpeachable. In these days there were many good generals, many great statesmen, there were enough signers to give character to the Declaration, but there was but one, John Dickinson, and Pennsylvania may well be proud of her share in him.

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